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Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4238

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NICOSIA 2518

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR LE
SUBJECT: THE POSITION OF THE CHRISTIANS VIS-A-VIS A SETTLE-
MENT OF THE LEBANESE CONFLICT

REF: NICOSIA 2491

1. THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION OF THE POSITION OF THE CHRISTIANS VIS-A-VIS A SETTLEMENT OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT IS BASED ON OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH ALL THE MAJOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND SOME OF SECONDARY ONES. ALTHOUGH WE SOUGHT AS MUCH PRECISION AS POSSIBLE DURING OUR STAY IN JOUNIEH, THE LEADERS WERE VAGUE ON SOME POINTS.

2. THE CHRISTIANS SEE THE PROBLEM OF A SETTLEMENT IN TWO PARTS, WITH A LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN SETTLEMENT TO PRECEDE RECONCILIATION WITH THE MOSLEM LEBANESE SIDE OF THE CONFLICT. AS FAR AS WE COULD DETERMINE THE MARONITES VIEW A CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM SETTLEMENT AS PRIMARILY A POLITICAL EXERCISE. ONLY SARKIS AND DORY CHAMOUN ALLUDED TO THE NECESSITY OF SOCIAL AND OTHER REFORMS. FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND WENT TO ABSURD LENGTHS WITH US TO TRY AND PROVE LEBANON WAS AN ADVANCED NATION AS FAR AS UN-EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS WERE CONCERNED. IN ANY EVENT, ALL LEADERS AGREED THIS PART OF THE CONFLICT WAS EASILY SETTLED ONCE, BUT NOT BEFORE, THE BASIC ISSUE--
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THE STATUS OF THE PALESTINIANS -- HAD BEEN RESOLVED.

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3. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT ALL MARONITE LEADERS, WITH
THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF SARKIS, AGREE THAT THERE CAN BE
NO SETTLEMENT UNLESS THE PALESTINIANS ARE WILLING TO
ABANDON THEIR PRESENT LEBANESE POLITICAL ROLE AND REVERT
TO THE STATUS OF GUESTS IN LEBANON. THE CHRISTIANS WILL
NOT ENDURE AGAIN ROAD BLOCKS AND OTHER FORMS OF HARASSMENT
OF LEBANESE IN LEBANON BY THE PALESTINIANS, AS THEY HAVE
SINCE 1969. THEY ALSO WISH TO PUT AN END TO A STATE OF
PERIODIC POLITICAL AND MILITARY CRISES IN LEBANON. DORY
CHAMOUN DEFINED THE CHRISTIAN OBJECTIVE AS "THE LIBERATION
OF LEBANON" (FROM THE PALESTINIANS). IN PRACTICAL TERMS
THIS MEANS THAT THE CHRISTIANS WILL ACCEPT THE CAIRO ACCORD
BUT WITH MODIFICATIONS WHICH WOULD (A) LEAVE THE PALESTINIANS
ONLY WITH LIGHT WEAPONS FOR CAMP SECURITY (THERE SEEMED
SOME CONFUSION ON THIS POINT) AND (B) REQUIRE THOSE
PALESTINIANS ARRIVING AFTER THE SIGNATURE OF THE CAIRO
ACCORD IN 1969 TO LEAVE LEBANON. THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS
WOULD ALSO INSIST ON A GUARTANTEE BY ONE OR A GROUP OF
NATIONS THAT THE CAIRO ACCORD WOULD BE APPLIED BY BOTH
SIDES. THEY APPEAR OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW THIS
COULD BE DONE. WE ARE NOT QUITE SURE WHAT THE STATUS OF THE
CAIRO ACCORD NEGOTIATIONS ARE.

4. HOW MUCH FLEXIBILITY THERE IS IN THE MARONITE POSITION
IS HARD TO DETERMINE. OBVIOUSLY, THE MARONITES ARE NOT
GIVING US THEIR FINAL POSITION. AFTER TALKING WITH
CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE ONE HAD THE IMPRESSION THERE WAS VERY
LITTLE GIVE IN THEIR POSITIONS. GEMAYAL AND SARKIS TALKED
A SOFTER LINE AND SPOKE OF THE URGENCY OF ENDING THE CON-
FLICT, WHILE THE OTHERS EXPRESSED WILLING READINESS TO
CONTINUE. OBVIOUSLY, MILITARY SUCCESSES HAVE EMBOLDENED
THEM TO PRESS THEIR OBJECTIVES TOWARD THE PALESTINIANS.
IN POINT OF FACT, IF ONE TAKES THE PREMISE THAT A
PALESTINIAN STATE WITHIN A LEBANESE STATE IS UNACCEPTABLE,
AND THE CHRISTIAN OBJECTIVE IS TO ELIMINATE PALESTINIAN
DOMESTIC POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, THEN THERE CAN'T BE MUCH
FLEXIBILITY IN THE CHRISTIAN POSITION, EXCEPT PERHAPS IN
TACTICS.

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5. ALL OF THEM SPEAK CONFIDENTLY OF THE STRENGTH OF
THEIR PRESENT MILITARY POSITION BUT DIFFER SOMEWHAT AS
TO THEIR CAPACITY TO SUSTAIN THAT POSITION FOR A LONG
TIME. THIS DEPENDS IN LARGE PART ON THEIR ASSESSMENT OF
SYRIA'S COMMITMENT TO LEBANON. AGAIN, FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN
APPEAR RELATIVELY CONFIDENT THAT SYRIA WILL STICK WITH
THEM UNTIL PEACE IS RESTORED ON CHRISTIAN TERMS. GEMAYEL
AND SARKIS ARE MORE SKEPTICAL. WE ARE NOT SURE THAT THE

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SYRIANS ARE COMPLETELY AWARE OF THE FULL THRUST OF THE MARONITE POSITION.

6. THE MARONITE LEADERS ARE ALL WORRIED ABOUT IRAQI, LIBYAN, KUWAITI, SAUDI, AND GULF STATE SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIANS. THE CHRISTIANS ARE OUTNUMBERED TO BEGIN WITH AND CONSEQUENTLY FEAR PALESTINIAN REINFORCEMENTS AND THE INFLUX OF MONEY WHICH PERMITS THE PALESTINIANS TO MAINTAIN THE STRUGGLE. THERE IS ALSO CONCERN THAT EGYPT WILL CONTINUE TO BACK THE PALESTINIANS AND ATTACK THE SYRIANS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. WE ALSO FOUND THAT THE MARONITES GENUINELY BELIEVE THE SOVIETS ARE FULLY BACKING THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LEFTISTS. ALL OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS MIGHT TEND TO MAKE THE CHRISTIANS MORE FLEXIBLE, BUT IN PRACTICE IT SEEMS TO HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT.

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

7. REGARDING PARITTION, THE BASIC MARONITE VIEW EXPRESSED TO US IS THAT PARTITION IS ONLY A FALLBACK POSITION IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO ACHIEVE AN END TO PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE POLITICS. MODERATES LIKE SARKIS ARE COMMITTED TO THE IDEA OF A UNIFIED LEBANON AND ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE IMAGE OF A MODERN CRUSADER STATE IN A MOSLEM SEA. PIERRE GEMAYEL, WHOSE FORCES BEAR THE TASK OF TRYING TO DEFEND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ISOLATED IN THE SOUTH, IS INTENSELY AWARE OF HOW IMPRACTICAL PARTITION WOULD BE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

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COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. THE HAWKISH LEADERS, SUCH AS FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN, SEEM CONFIDENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO REUNIFY LEBANON ON THEIR WON TERMS AND ARE PREAPRED TO CONTINUE THE PRESENT DE FACTO PARTITION OF LEBANON IF THAT IS NECESSARY. IN SUM, WE DO NOT SENSE THAT PARTITION IS A POLICY OBJECTIVE OF ANY OF THE MARONITE LEADERS, BUT WE DO SENSE THAT SOME ENVISAGE THE PROSPECT OF PARTITION WITH MORE EQUANIMITY THAN OTHERS.

8. OUR INFLUENCE ON THE MARONITES WILL VARY, OF COURSE, IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO WHAT THEY THINK WE ARE DOING FOR THEM. WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE, ACCORDING TO OUR CONVERSATIONS, IS (A) A REPRESENTATIVE STATIONED IN JUNIEH TO MAINTAIN CONTACT, (B) DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE ON THOSE STATES AIDING THE PALESTINIANS, (C) SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION, AND (D) ANY OTHER ACTION DESIGNED

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TO STOP THE FIGHTING AND ESTABLISH PEACE.

9. WE HAVE NOT DEPICTED CHRISTIAN PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE. EXCEPT FOR DORY CHAMOUN'S SPECULATION AND PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S REFERENCE TO A CONSORTIUM FOR POSTWAR CONSTRUCTION, ALL HAVE CONCENTRATED QUITE NATURALLY ON THE CURRENT PROBLEMS. DORY TALKED OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT BEYOND BYBLOS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MODERN STATE WITHOUT DEFINING HIS TERMS. IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT ENERGIES ARE BEING SPENT ON THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE HAS BEEN CONSIDERED ONLY IN GENERAL TERMS. THE ONLY EXCEPTION TO THIS IS SARKIS, WHO HAVING FOUAD BOUTROS AND MICHEL KHOURY WRITE STRATEGY PAPERS IN ANTICIPATION OF HIS ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE.

10. SEPTEL FOLLOWS LISTING QUESTIONS RAISED BY LEBANESE AND FOR WHICH WE MUST HAVE ANSWERS.
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